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ABSTRACT

Three interrelated strategies of print instruction can be used to connect kindergarten students to writing and literature: (1) connecting the child to previous experiences; (2) connecting verbal and written language; and (3) connecting children to literature, print, and writing. Children can link their past experiences to print by labeling classroom items, using a "message" board and sign-in sheets instead of taking attendance orally, and writing in journals. Verbal speech can be related to print by daily routines of reading aloud the calendar, weather chart, and daily schedule. Verbal speech can also be connected to print by reading aloud songs and poems, by communicating through "written" conversations, and by writing books from the children's verbal recounting of events in their lives. Finally, teachers can help children understand the connection between literature and print by providing a large variety of books and ample time to look at them, by helping children understand and appreciate literature through book extensions, reading strategy instruction, and literature study, by integrating literature across the curriculum, and by reading aloud to the class. (Examples of a label book page, sign-in sheet, and a written conversation are attached, as well as lists of helpful materials to use in the classroom.) (MM)

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Connecting The Kindergartner To Writing And Literature

by Judy Morran and Denise Ogren
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March 1989

We utilize three interrelated strategies of print instruction to connect the kindergartner to writing and literature; first we connect children to their previous literary experiences, second we help children connect verbal and written language, and third we connect children to literature and print.

Each of the segments are taught simultaneously throughout the year usually within a thematic context. As the school year opens, we begin by connecting children's previous experiences with print that they already understand to writing in the classroom environment.

Connecting The Child To Previous Experiences

By previous experiences, we mean activities that children have engaged in at home or in their environment prior to beginning school. Children participate in numerous literacy experiences without knowing it. Our goal is to point out these accomplishments to the children.

Our program accomplishes this by utilizing the following:

1. **Labels**

As the first weeks of school unfold each child is encouraged to bring from home a label from a can, box, fast food product, etc.. The labels are read and shared, and then pasted or stapled into a ring-bound book where the teacher or child writes how or when the product was utilized. See Figure 1. This procedure helps the children see the words, the print , with which they have previously interacted, and they then discover that they are already "reading" the label. Children are helped to read these labels by the environmental context clues, ie. the logo, pictures etc. By helping children become aware that the print in their environment has meaning, we are providing the first step in connecting children to the more formal reading process.

2. **Sign-in-sheets**: As an alternative to taking attendance and as a means to encourage the children's beginning relationships with print, sign-in sheets are placed by the door each day. See Figure 2. During the day children sign in to indicate their presence. (The teacher at the end of the session circles the names of absent children since not all consistently "sign-in".) This method is an effective way of connecting children to their previous literacy experiences because it utilizes their names which are a powerful print item. They're personable to children and definitely have meaning. To increase the meaningfulness of the sign - in sheet , we also use it for counting the number of children in the classroom, as when we need to know how many snacks to lay out. If children have not signed-in, then they do not get a snack - you should see the race to the sign-in table then. In addition, each child's name label is displayed in the classroom and referred to all year with statements such as "R as in Rachel "or "i as in Phillip". Names relate much about print and

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communication to the child throughout their cognitive development with language.

3. **Room Labels and Signs:** Children interact with labels and signs prior to kindergarten entrance. They understand *K-Mart, McDonald's* and various labels on trucks, boxes, toys,etc. By labeling room items, children can generalize what they already know about labels to the ones in the classroom. Cards labeling such classroom items as *playhouse, blocks, science table* are posted around the room. With encouragement from the teacher, children can make their own signs and labels. Signs which explain classroom rules are also posted. Usually the children contribute to the making of the rules and thus have a real interest and knowledge about them.

4. **Creating Common Experiences:** As we establish our classroom routines at the beginning of the year we make a concerted effort to include print in as many ways as possible. We establish a certain way to sign-up for helper jobs; we have our own class way of opening the day and reading the calendar; we list the daily schedule -eg. *class meeting, story, recess, go home.* The children build bridges from visualizing everyday routines to the print that represents them. This is similar to the process they have learned in interpreting and interacting with print from labels. Soon the words take on the meaning of the routine as the common experience is shared daily with the entire class.

When the entire class is studying a unit, we are establishing a common experience for the children in the class. Each child is then exposed to new words and can begin to connect the learning about the new topic, eg. dinosaurs, to literacy experiences that we develop to go with the unit.

5. **Shopping List , Phone Message Pad,etc.**: Besides labeling classroom items, articles of print that normally occur in our world are included in the classroom whenever appropriate; again, to help children bridge from what they already know about print to our classroom experience. A shopping list pad is placed in the playhouse, with phone book and message pad. Signs are often posted in the block corner *Do Not Knock Down.* Science specimens on the science table are labeled, *rock, snakeskin,* etc. Maps are posted in the shuttle to help the astronaut during space study.

6. **Mail Messages:** The back of a large bookcase is covered with styrofoam insulation and blue fabric and used as a central message board. Children have had experiences with "messages" by watching their parents or other adults receive mail and letters. Thus our message board connects those previous experiences with our classroom interactions. Special notes from individuals are posted and often messages are sent between the morning and afternoon class. When both classes voted on our gerbil's nme, the message board displayed posters urging other to *Vote for Cuddles* or *Vote for Missy.*

7.**Journals:** Journal writing is an excellent way to help children make the connection from past literacy experiences to present writing experiences

because it reflects what they already know and helps them extend their expertise as they write through the year. We begin journal writing on the first day of school to impress upon the children that it is just " part of our day". Instructing the children to draw a picture and then write about it, we initially accept any means of communication from them as long as they can read it to us. Their written responses can range from scribbles to letter/phoneme correspondence to actual conventional print. As long as the classroom atmosphere is a "no risk" situation, children will try to "write" to you. After they read their message to us, we respond back in writing; reading it to them, often using a key noun they wrote so the can view it in conventional print. We may respond back with a question that requires a yes or no answer, or as we read our message back we may pause before saying the final word so they can predict the ending.

Journals provide windows into much of what the child is conceptualizing and /or experiencing in his life, and are a powerful teaching tool for language acquisition.

As the year progresses we raise our standards individually for each child in terms of the artwork and message quality. Children generally progress in this manner regardless of writing development;

-just artwork
-scribble messages
-random letters (often letters from their name)
-beginning sounds
-consonants (beginning and ending sounds)
-word spacing
- then gradually using more vowels, sentences and punctuation.

Basically we encourage development by using helpful statements such as "You said barn. What does that start with? Where is the B in your message?" Doing purposeful writing helps children strive to do their best, for example, when we made a journal for a visiting weatherman, the messages all boosted to a higher level.

Finally, be careful about choosing a journal time. It should be a flexible time- a time when kids are fresh, and ideally when you have extra adult help. (But we do it many days alone!) It takes time to respond to each child and makes a chaotic situation if too many children are kept waiting too long. Some children will finish very quickly and other may take twenty minutes. We have found that we need to experiment each year to find the best time of day to do journals.

In summary

To help children connect their past experiences with writing to print we need to:

1. Build bridges that draw from the child's life to the classroom.
2. Accept children as they are and encourage their free expression to you.

3. Set up experiences and situations that reflect "real" everyday living and use print with them.

Connecting Verbal and Written Language

Children also need to be encouraged to make the connection between verbal language and written language; to understand that their words can be captured in time and put on paper for future reference, and to understand that they can communicate through written language as well as spoken language. Once children realize that writing is only " talk on paper", then the mystique and fear associated with writing is eliminated. If they can talk, then they can write.

Establish A Reason For Writing

Next children need to establish a reason for writing. The reasons are similar to those for children talking; number one is to communicate to other people. In addition, writing is used to remind oneself or to remind others, to inform, to clarify ideas. These reasons for writing can be pointed out or demonstrated to young children. Instead of indirect references, teachers can make direct demonstrations to the children, for example, by saying " I am going to write this down so I don't forget." To a child afraid to leave his block structure because he fears someone might knock it down, we might say "What can you do so everyone will know this is your house?" Very soon, children will learn to make signs (written messages).

Connecting Daily Verbal Speech To Print

As part of our daily routine, we read the calendar, weather chart, and the daily schedule. We point to the words as we read them and talk about the letters they contain. It is important that children see all the print in their environment and realize that reading it is very easy.

Using Songs And Poems

Each day we try to read a poem and sing a song. Our favorite ones are recorded on a large poster which the children then illustrate. The illustration gives them additional clues to the meaning of the words on the chart. Since all our kindergarten children are not familiar with nursery rhymes, we start the year using nursery rhymes. These songs and poems are also typed in large print and put in each child's "Song Book binder" so they have an individual copy that they can read and illustrate. Once the children learn the poem, nursery rhyme, or song, then it becomes easy for them to read the words on the chart. Children take turns pointing to the words on the chart and we play a game of finding the first word, last word, etc. We talk about the letters these words begin with and associate these sounds with names of people in our class.

Using The Children's Names

Generally kindergarten teachers have felt that since children cannot read on their own, there was no point to write things down for them. In reality, just the opposite is true. By writing down as much as possible, children are encouraged to refer to the print, become familiar with it and to become writers themselves. Beginning with their own names, teachers can use the written form instead of the verbal form to dismiss a group, call a child up front, etc. We put a

tremendous emphasis on names - giving them as much visibility as possible - posting them on the walls, having children match sets of names, using them to teach phonics. When writing a class journal, we incorporate as many individual names as possible. The names serve as clues to help the children remember the rest of the sentence, and also encourage interest so the journals will be reread by the children.

Class journals are similar to the experience charts from the language experience approach to reading. As the children dictate experiences they have had, we write the words on large chart paper. They also serve as demonstrations of how and what to put in individual journals, how to figure out the spelling of words, how to space words and how to use punctuation.

Spotlight Person Of The Week

A similar group activity to demonstrate the connection between verbal and written language is the "Spotlight Person of the Week". Each week one child is selected as a spotlight person. He/she gets to lead the class line and bring in special items from home. The rest of the class ask the Spotlight person questions about him/ herself. We usually ask six questions because the children are six years old. The answers are written on large chart paper and later typed out and put in a special Spotlight Book for later reading. This group activity involves the children's thinking up questions, listening to the answers and helping formulate the sentences on the chart. We look at the spelling of words (phonics) and make a list of common words we already know how to spell. We often count how many words in the full sentence before we write it on the chart , and we point out the separation between words as we write, and we count them. Children help sound out the words and we look from one sentence to the next to see if there are similar words to copy. We also take turns reading the finished sentences. This activity has become the most successful lesson for combining thinking, speaking, reading and writing. More ideas and concepts are discussed during this activity than any other one we do.

We Write Books

An individual activity that focuses the children on written print is the *Birthday Book*. Whenever a child celebrates a birthday, we make a book for that child. Each student and teacher draws a picture and writes a message or story to the birthday child. The book is read at the end of the day and taken home. The children are encouraged to write *Happy Birthday* the verbal message you tell someone on their birthday.

Books are composed for any and every possible reason - a thank you to our janitor for our new shelves, a congratulations to a teacher with a new baby, a thank you to a mom who helped with our party. Invitations, valentines, Christmas cards, Thanksgiving cards are all encouraged and individually written by each child. If there is no set message to copy, children devise their own and we translate or edit it so the receiver or recipient will be able to understand it. We have made good-bye books to student teachers when they left, a museum book about our trip to the museum, an address book for each child to take home and use to call their friends, a tadpole book of observations

watching the tadpoles grow, a Mother Goose book of our favorite rhymes, a vacation book about what we did over the holidays. Class books where each child submits one page are glued back to back and laminated. Children are allowed to check these out and take them home to read. We also often include a blank page in the back for parent comments.

When children bring something for the science table, we ask them to write a note about their item and write their name on it. This message varies according to the level of the child. They are learning that written communication can tell their friends about their science item just as easily as verbal communication.

Written Conversation

An exercise that clearly demonstrates to children that print is words on paper is the "written conversation" or "talk on paper". See Figure 3. This is usually done with one adult and one child although we have done it with fifth graders and third graders in place of the adult. Each partner takes turns writing messages to each other on one piece of paper. The rules are that you can't talk to each other, however you can read your message to your partner after you write it. This is really a fun activity and a wonderful exercise to see how much the children understand about print.

Writing Stories and Individual Books

Journal stories are supposed to be about the children themselves although many children have trouble with this concept and write about other topics. Later we begin a story folder where children write stories and become authors of stories about other things. We usually have them write for several days and then pick out their favorite story. Then we have them read it to us and we type it up or write it out very neatly. Ideally, we have an author's circle where they share their story and ask for comments. Changes are made and the story is retyped and edited by the teacher. We make individual books and the children illustrate their stories. Last year our books were placed in the School Library so children could check them out.

In Summary

To help children understand the connection between verbal and written print, we need to:

1. Provide an environment rich in print.
2. Refer to and point out this print to the children.
3. Encourage children to write down their verbal messages.

Connecting Children To Literature, Print , and Writing

Connecting children to literature takes place along side connecting them to their previous environment and to written print. In fact, literature is the tool whereby teachers can help children make connections. By providing a large variety of books and ample time to look at and read them, we help children find a book of particular interest to them. By reading to children daily, children build up a repertoire of stories and books they know and love, We always point out

the author and illustrator to the children and explain what that means. We try to help the children become familiar with authors and develop favorites. By having children illustrate the song charts, the children gain an understanding about illustrators.

Buddies

Another way we emphasize the importance of books and reading is by arranging a reading Buddy in an upper grade. We get together once a week so the older child can read to his/her kindergarten buddy. The kindergartner also brings predictable books to read to his/her Buddy, and we also encourage them to write together. Not only does this activity encourage reading for both groups of children but the intergrade connection also provides an additional link to another person in the school. Buddies often exchange Christmas cards and presents and play together on the playground .

Pointing Out the Words In Books; Big Books

Literature books can be used to point out the connections between verbal speech and the printed word. We usually try to point to the words on the page as we read so the children understand that these letters when put together on the paper carry the meaning of the story. We will ask them "Where do I read this story?" Large editions of books are especially helpful for this since they make the print more accessible to a large group of children. We will find the first word, last word, and any special words on the page after we have first read the story for meaning. It is important that the meaning and enjoyment of a book come first. Don't use a book for instruction of phonics, word identification, etc. until the children are familiar with the story and understand and enjoy it. They should not feel that every story will be dissected.

Multiple Copies

Multiple copies of books are helpful so children can point to the words in their own copy. Multiple copies are also helpful for a listening center where children can listen to a familiar story on the tape recorder. We tell our children that they need to point to the words as they listen to the words on the tape.

We make individual copies of some books. Brown Bear, Brown Bear by Bill Martin is an easy one. We read the original , then we draw very basic pictures of the animals. The children color the animals using the color from the story. We also write the words in the book. On the back of individual books, we put a paper that says; "I have read this book to:" When they read their book to an adult, then that person may sign the paper. This serves as an additional incentive for the children to read their books.

Extensions from literature

The possibilities for extending literature into writing are endless. Nearly every picture book can be used for a writing activity. For example;

-provide a different ending: The Three Little Pigs
-make into a drama; Who Took The Farmer's Hat?
-rewrite your own idea: If The Dinosaurs Came Back
-make into a mathematics operations book: Seven Little Rabbits

-extend with music; Old MacDonald
-change the characters; The Postman

Another way that books can be extended by writing activities is to have a small group of children write a group story on a large chart and share this with the rest of the class. After reading The Postman book, we wrote letters to other book characters. During our transportation unit we wrote group stories about taking a trip.

Using Literature to Teach Reading

Learning Meaningful Words and Phonics

The world of literature is a goldmine of reading lessons. As we read to children, books, songs, fingerplays, poems - repeated readings can be used in a myriad of ways to introduce meaningful words for developing a "reading vocabulary" and teaching phonics, comprehension and reading strategies. Words such as *a, the, and* ,etc. are easily learned from literature and subsequent activities that reinforce the story. For example, after reading In The Dark Dark Wood, a book in the Storybox Series from The Wright Company the children illustrated the story using watercolors, then wrote a caption under their pictures; *up the dark, dark stairs, in the dark, dark cupboard. The* began to take on meaning and form. That same Halloween we read a story The Ghost also from The Storybox which emphasized the "oo" sound in boo, too, moo, soon, etc. The children learned the association quickly and as the year progressed generalized their knowledge to other words when reading and writing.

Using Basals and Workbooks

The use of basals and workbooks does not necessarily mean your reading program has to be locked into phonetic, disconnected learning. Use the basals as literature books - read for meaning and enjoyment then glean a few basic skills to teach using not just workbook pages but dramatics , art, music, making individual books, and remember you do not have to do every workbook page.

Developing Themes or Units

Perhaps the easiest way to organize a reading/writing program that connects the child to literature and print is to develop themes or units. Then integrate the subjects to be taught with literature. We usually pick a topic that is teacher or class selected and then comb the school, county and our own personal libraries for literature that we want to include - as introductions, additions to information, extensions or enrichment. Here's what a typical brainstorming sheet about the *moon* might look like from the unit on Space.

Language Arts;
-Read: The moon books by Frank Asch as lead into moon study.
- Make" moon " books by sending home a page that the children color in what they see each night and write what the moon looks like, time and date.

-Read: A Walk On the Moon.
-Write about the moon in our journals .

Science:
- Read: The Moon Seems to Change after discussing moon observation pages from home.

Math:
-Observe and discuss moon changes.
-Is there a pattern or sequence?
-Write numbers for date and time on the observation paper.
-Discuss moon shapes .

Large/small Motor Skills;
-Trace words and color picture of moon for space dictionary.
-Trace moon circles for pages to go home.
-Cut and paste moon information on pages that go home.

Art
-Draw and /or paint favorite moon shapes.

Music
-Sing and put in our songbooks "Oh, Mr. Moon".

Centers;
-Books about the moon.
-Photos of moon .
-Blocks in the block corner to build space shuttle.
-Set out model shuttle to investigate and play with.

Group Time;
-Discuss moon observations.
-Record on class chart those observations.
-Discuss Neil Armstrong's walk.
-Show how the moon revolves around the earth.
-Put word *moon* in word chart.

In summary

To help children understand the connection between literature and print, we need to:

1. Provide a variety of enjoyable, adaptable books that are "good" children's literature,- some of which are predictable.
2. Make good literature available to children by having these books easily accessible - some on tapes and enough for several children to read together.
3. Help children understand and appreciate literature through book extensions, reading strategy instruction and literature study.
4. Integrate literature across the curriculum.
5. Read to them.

Figure 1

Label Books

Crest

We brush our teeth with Crest toothpaste

Jake Chris M Joey
Joni Levi
April Danielle
Charlene

Ryan likes Kentucky Fried Chicken

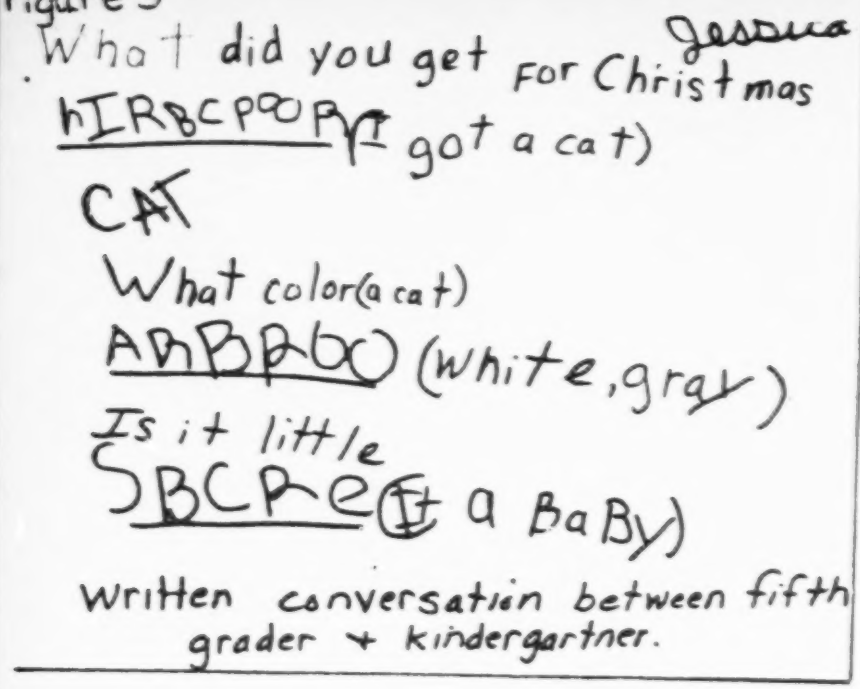
Figure 2.

Sign in Sheets

Today is

April	Joey
Brandon	Joni
Brett	Kassi
Charlene	Kesha
Chris B.	Levi
Chris M.	Nathan
Danielle	Mrs. Ogren
David	Ryan
Erika	Stacy
Glenn	
Jake	

Figure 3



Written conversation between fifth grader + kindergartner.

HELPFUL MATERIALS

Staplers - long arm staplers
Paper - all sizes
Hole punches
3 ring hole punch
Rings
Markers
Glue Sticks
Construction Paper books (already made)
Tubs/baskets (plastic)
Cardboard
Multiple copies of books
Big Books
Alphabet stencils
Alphabet Cards
Alphabet Books
Dictionaries

REALLY HELPS BUT CAN BE FLEXIBLE

Listening Center - earphones, tape recorder & tape deck

Writing Center - Paper, markers, envelopes, dictionaries, words, stapler tape, etc.

Several book shelves and book rack

Peer tutors

Parent volunteers

KIDS BRING IN

3 Ring folder
3 Ring binder
Glue Stick
Paints
Markers